

Love, like Bread, Should be Made Fresh Everyday

Somewhere, in the blizzard of history, my people are squatting in the middle of a melting garden plot, extracting handfuls of earth-laden carrots bound together by sharp shards of frozen soil. Blades of ice jab them as they dig fat fingers deeper and deeper into the frigid, gloppy mud until every carrot has been exhumed. Once we have them all, we move them to the shed, where we will wash them in a never-ending stream of bone cold mountain water until they shine deep orange. When we are through our fingers will be numb and our hands will burn icy hot and be the same red color as the poppies that will appear in the plot's tall grasses four months from now. Five years from now. Fifty years from now. Fifty years ago.

I close my eyes and hear thunder rumble from above. The great parody of nature embodied in the kitsch of the modern grocery store. I lean into the shelves overwrought with vegetables, anticipating the mist that will soon be released from hidden jets and freckle the bridge of my nose with room temperature water. The mist that promises to re-invigorate the outer leaves of the savoy cabbages, to shine the skins of the daikon's, to make the celery's stalks sparkle, and fleck the fronds of dill with enduring, man-made freshness. My hand grazes the rippled leaves savoy cabbage, fingering its rubbery smooth caul fat pattern. I open my eyes and see cabbage rolls, buoyant in a bath of oily tomato, bobbing in my grandmother's enameled cherry-red Dutch oven.

Somewhere in the blizzard of history, this Dutch oven sits atop her wood stove. The beating heart of her homestead, the stove will yield the right level of heat for the right amount of time, so that the stuffed cabbage will cook to her liking, so that the house will stay warm

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overnight, and so that enough coals will remain to begin anew tomorrow. With a wooden spoon, she pokes into the pot, keeping each head intact, none of her stuffing will enter her sauce.

“Agriculture,” she says, driving her thick-wristed palm down flat, “productivity,” reverberating the cherry wood table. She is the Piper who scoffs at the weaklings who open their wallets. No fire is warmer than one made by the tree that succumbed to your blow. No cabbage is more delicious than the one you personally planted, tended, and decapitated. She lashes out silent jabs and crushing defeats in a bloodless war that takes place over hot bowls of stuffed cabbage. Each buttery cut releases a volcano of steam, every savory bite scalds the roof of your mouth. Above the woodstove, her favorite plaque hangs, ‘Love, like bread, should be made fresh everyday’.

Somewhere in the blizzard of history, my hand caresses the fringe of a savoy cabbage in a Safeway in California as mist, designed to keep the products of global agriculture looking fresher than a business-man de-boarding a red-eye from Paris, is defused into the atmosphere of the organic produce section. How quickly the shine of nature fades in the hundred hand handle that moved the savoy cabbage from a Mexican field to this Safeway. In the morning dew we all begin anew.

I buy the cabbage for a dollar fifty a pound, and I take it home, and I compost the outer leaves. I admire its fringe edges, its delicate, lacey caul fat pattern. I slice it thinly and sauté it with garlic, and butter, and salt and white wine. While it cooks on my gas burner I run my hands under bone cold water, until my skin burns icy red, like the carnations I can buy at the grocery store, anytime I want to, but never do.